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Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Economic and Social Council the report by the Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union on the first phase and progress in the preparations for the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society as requested in General Assembly resolution 57/238.

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Summary

The present report has been prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 57/238, which calls upon the Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union to report annually to the General Assembly, through the Economic and Social Council, on preparations for the World Summit on the Information Society.

It provides, inter alia, a report on the outcome of the first phase of the Summit, held in Geneva, from 10 to 13 December 2003, as well as details on the preparations under way for the second phase of the Summit, to be held in Tunis from 16 to 18 November 2005.

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Report of the Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union on the first phase and progress in the preparations for the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society

I. Background

1. The impetus for the World Summit on the Information Society began with a resolution introduced by Tunisia and adapted by the 1998 Plenipotentiary Conference of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). This resolution called for consultations among the United Nations agencies, which led to agreement on the need to hold a World Summit on this topic. At its 2001 session, the International Telecommunication Union Council decided that the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) would be held in two phases: in Geneva from 10 to 12 December 2003 and in Tunis from 16 to 18 November 2005.

2. The Summit was endorsed by the General Assembly of the United Nations in resolutions 56/183 and 57/238. The resolutions call upon the Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union to report annually to the Economic and Social Council on the Summit.

3. The Summit was convened under the high patronage of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, with ITU taking the lead role in its preparation, in cooperation with other interested United Nations agencies and other international agencies, and the host countries, Switzerland and Tunisia.

4. The World Summit on the Information Society was designed to provide a global platform where key players — Governments, United Nations agencies, the private sector and civil society — could come together to develop a common vision and understanding of the information society and to adopt a declaration and a plan of action.

II. Summit format

5. The preparation and holding of the World Summit on the Information Society introduced several innovations to the holding of global summits.

6. First, it was decided to hold the Summit in two phases, with Switzerland and Tunisia as the host countries. The first phase took place in Geneva and the second is scheduled for Tunis on 16-18 November 2005. This two-step process and the involvement of host countries from the North and South is facilitating full consideration of all relevant issues and promoting accountability of the Summit output, since the second phase can review the achievements of the period following the first phase. Several difficult issues that could not be resolved in Geneva can be further considered in Tunisia.

7. Furthermore, considering that issues of the information society touch on the mandates of many agencies and programmes of the United Nations system, in 1999 the Chief Executives Board (CEB) of United Nations agency heads established the High-level Summit Organizing Committee (HLSOC) to coordinate the role and input of United Nations agencies in the Summit. The Committee is chaired by the

ITU Secretary-General and met formally on two occasions and at working level five times to prepare for the first phase. The Committee was instrumental in providing input to the Summit that led to recognition of the importance of international organizations as a stakeholder in implementing the Geneva Action Plan. Next, the Summit achieved further progress in ensuring the involvement of all stakeholders in major world gatherings. Both the private sector and civil society were closely involved in the Summit preparations and contributed significantly to the meetings of the Preparatory Committee. Civil society formed a bureau to represent its diverse viewpoints, and both that bureau and the private sector met on several occasions with the governmental bureau of the Summit. Sector members of ITU were automatically accredited to participate in the Summit and the preparatory process.

8. Finally, the Summit was organized on the basis of voluntary donations of funding and staff. The United Nations General Assembly did not provide any funding for the Summit and ITU governing bodies allocated only minimal sums. Given its multidisciplinary nature, an Executive Secretariat was established, based in Geneva and hosted by ITU, to prepare the Summit, consisting of experts detached from Governments, United Nations agencies, civil society and the private sector. Finances for Summit preparations were obtained through a fund-raising campaign to attract voluntary contributions and through a loan mechanism established by ITU.

III. Summit preparatory phase

9. To identify the themes to be considered by the Summit, a preparatory process was initiated in July 2002. This process was led by the three preparatory committee meetings, which were held during 2002 and 2003.

10. In addition to the preparatory committee meetings, regional preparatory conferences were also held to assess challenges, opportunities and constraints stemming from the information society, to develop a common vision for the region and to prepare a plan to address the key issues and solve the problems identified.

11. The results of the regional conferences have been considered official contributions to the Summit, and their content was formally considered in the drafting of Summit documents. More information about the preparatory process is available at: http://www.itu.int/wsis/preparatory/index.html.

IV. Outcome of the first phase of the Summit

12. The Summit was organized by ITU and Switzerland, with the support of many United Nations agencies, through the High-Level Summit Organizing Committee (HLSOC). The Secretary-General of ITU served as Secretary-General of the Summit and of the preparatory committee meetings.

13. The Geneva phase was the first global gathering of world leaders to address the issues of the information society, including the use of information and communication technologies for development, cyber-security, Internet governance, affordable access to communications, infrastructure and capacity-building, cultural diversity and the media.

14. The Untied Nations Secretary-General expressed a very positive attitude to information and communication technologies in his opening remarks to the Summit, pointing out that it was perhaps the first global Summit to be built around an opportunity rather than a problem.

15. The first phase was widely considered to be a success. Close to 50 heads of State or Government and vice-presidents attended the Summit. More than 11,000 delegates participated in the deliberations, representing 175 United Nations Member States. Other delegates who attended included:

- 3,300 representatives of civil society
- 514 business representatives from 99 organizations
- 87 international organizations
- More than 1,000 journalists.

16. The first phase was also the occasion for more than 300 Summit-related events in Geneva, including major meetings organized by many different United Nations agencies and other regional and international organizations.

17. The core outputs of the World Summit on the Information Society from the first phase are contained in two basic documents — a Declaration of Principles and a Plan of Action — which were drafted during the preparatory process and adopted by Governments in plenary at the Summit. The final texts are available at http://www.itu.int/wsis/.

A. Achieving a common vision of the information society

18. The information society may be defined as a society in which social and economic development is based at least as much on the use of information and knowledge and on the exchange of services, as on industry or natural resources.

19. The Declaration defines a common vision of an inclusive and people-centred information society, in which all citizens should be able to create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge. For this reason, the Declaration recognizes that information and communication technologies are a fundamental tool to foster social and economic development. Their advancement and promotion by Governments and other stakeholders are prerequisites for this achievement.

B. Setting out an agenda for building an inclusive, development-oriented information society

20. After setting forth a definition of what an information society should be, the Declaration establishes 11 basic principles. Key among them are the importance of infrastructure as an essential foundation of the information society, the need for affordable access to information and knowledge, capacity-building, enabling environment, building confidence and security in the use of information and communication technologies, e-applications and international and regional cooperation.

21. Following those principles, the Plan of Action lists a wide range of activities that must be undertaken to harness the potential of information and communication technologies to contribute towards human progress. The Plan of Action can be subdivided into two parts. The first is a set of objectives and action lines to be achieved by 2015, with the main intent being to ensure access to information and communications by all citizens, coupled with specific targets and dates to connect all key institutions (schools, hospitals, etc.).

22. The second part of the Action Plan links the principles of the Declaration with specific actions. Although the Plan of Action is addressed to all stakeholders, in many sections, it refers specifically to tasks to be undertaken by international organizations and to their efforts to assist Governments.

23. Together, the documents represent a forceful statement of the case for information and communication technologies, including specific targets for connectivity and information and communication technology deployment and applications that could be implemented nationally and internationally to help achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

C. Initiate action in a number of crucially important areas, such as the creation of a digital solidarity fund and Internet governance

24. Since the Summit will have two phases, participants have the possibility to continue discussion on two particularly complex issues that could not be resolved in Geneva, i.e., Internet governance and financing mechanisms.

25. To move forward, the Declaration and Plan of Action call upon the Secretary-General of the United Nations to establish a working group on Internet governance and to organize a task force on financing mechanisms to bridge the digital divide.

26. To support the process of consultations on the issue of Internet governance, a small secretariat will be set up in Geneva. Since last December, a number of meetings on Internet governance have already been organized to follow up on the Summit's outcomes: an ITU workshop (Geneva, 26 and 27 February 2004); an Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers workshop (Rome, 5 and 6 March 2004); a meeting of the International Chamber of Commerce's (ICC) special advisory committee (Paris, 24 February 2004); and a United Nations Information and Communication Technology Task Force global forum on Internet governance (New York, 25 and 26 March 2004). These events attracted wide participation from all sectors and helped the various stakeholders to achieve a better understanding of the issues involved and to convey their respective positions.

27. As for a task force on Information and Communication Technology funding, the Administrator of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has been asked to take the lead in following up on the relevant recommendations of the World Summit on the Information Society, in consultation with the World Bank and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat.

V. Summit implementation and the role of the United Nations family

28. The Summit provides a departure point for action. All stakeholders will have now to continue contributing to the preparation of the Summit's second phase and work to implement the Plan of Action approved in Geneva.

29. The next steps towards the second phase require United Nations agencies to contribute to the implementation of the Geneva Plan of Action within their respective mandates, to help organize and actively participate in thematic meetings and other Summit-related events, and to contribute both staff and financial resources to the secretariat of the Summit.

A. United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination

30. The outcome of the first phase was on the agenda of the Board meeting, which took place in Vienna on 2 April 2004. The Board considered the first phase of the Summit a success, and stressed the importance of implementing the Plan of Action of the Geneva phase and collectively addressing the challenges ahead, in particular those involving the key issues of Internet governance and funding mechanisms to bridge the digital divide. It urged its members to participate actively in the preparatory process of the Tunis phase of the Summit and contribute to ensuring its success. The Committee also requested the High-level Committee on Programmes for a substantive, action-oriented paper to assist its deliberations on the subject at its fall 2004 session, building on the work of the High-Level Summit Organizing Committee.

B. High-Level Summit Organizing Committee

31. The High-Level Summit Organizing Committee held its third meeting on 1 April 2004, just ahead of the Board meeting in Vienna, to evaluate Summit outcomes and the possible role of United Nations organizations.

32. Members underlined the importance of a system-wide mobilization in implementing the Summit's outcomes, and concluded that United Nations agencies must make every effort so that they can report on significant progress at the Tunis phase of the Summit. This will require careful collaboration and cooperation among Board members to avoid duplication of efforts and to enhance synergies. To achieve this, a careful and thorough stocktaking exercise of current and planned actions relating to the Summit is going to be prepared with the participation of all Organizing Committee members, and will then be posted on the Summit web site.

VI. Towards the second phase

33. An informal brainstorming took place in Hammamet, Tunisia, on 2 and 3 March 2004, to exchange ideas and views on the path to follow towards the second phase of the Summit.

34. The Geneva phase of the Summit called for a preparatory meeting in the first half of 2004 to set the road map and the issues for the second phase. This meeting will be held in Hammamet from 24 to 26 June 2004.

35. The provisional Bureau for the Summit has been established, with 30 members plus the two host countries.

VII. Conclusion

36. **Building on the success of the first phase, there is great interest in this second phase and in the realization of the objectives set out in the Plan of Action. However, it is important to fully benefit from the momentum gained and from the goodwill and the international consensus among all stakeholders generated during the Geneva phase of the Summit. It is vital that Governments support the second phase, and the Secretary-General of ITU has already launched a fund-raising campaign for that purpose.**